

Westford Town Hall
Westford, MA
June 16, 2010

Historic Exterior Paint Colors

Executive Summary

From dated photograph of the building, c 1900:

Clapboards	Westchester Gray 2849 Semi-gloss	Sherwin Williams Preservation Palette
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Trim	Classical White 2829 Semi-gloss	Sherwin Williams Preservation Palette
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Sash Darkroom 7083 Sherwin Williams
(wood in contact with glass only) gloss

Front & exterior doors—same as sash—highest gloss

After installation of current cupola & frontispiece, post-1938

Clapboards Roycroft Vellum Sherwin Williams
Preservation Palette

It is likely that *sash and doors remained* black.

N.B. **Shutters** for either scheme Chrome Green gloss Benjamin Moore

The purpose of this brief narrative is to present an appropriate historic exterior color schedule for the Westford Town Hall. The present Town Hall Building has portions of both its original 1870-1880 appearance, and of its 1938 alterations. Photographs of the building showing the significant revision of its Victorian street façade after the 1938 hurricane destroyed the tall central tower at the front show also that the paint scheme at that time was one with somewhat dark clapboards and light trim.

Stacey Perron of the Historical Commission sent a time line which indicates changes typical of Victorian town halls: in 1880 the building was extended 15 feet at the rear, a kitchen was installed, and "a new Victorian tower [was]added to the front." (e-mail from

smperron27 to sbcprescon, April 5, 2010) The assembly area or auditorium on the second floor had its “stage moved back,” probably to allow for more persons to attend Town Meeting and performances.

During a site visit to collect samples of the building, I found one item on the interior worth saving. On the second story near the front or west end of the building there was a handsome frieze band of pressed tin on the south wall. It probably dates from the 1880 alterations, and it was probably around the seating area in the gallery of the auditorium.

Although some clapboard samples and some trim samples, as well as some sash samples strongly suggest that the Town Hall had a Victorian color scheme which included soft beige clapboards and deeper brown trim, those colors were not matched, nor are they recommended. The building as altered c 1880 had received its Colonial Revival gray and white color scheme well before the 1938 hurricane destroyed the tall front tower, as the earliest photograph available at this time shows. In addition, the building had received other colonial details: corner quoins (which provide historical contrast to the very Victorian paired brackets along the eave rake at the back of the building).

Some elements from 1870-1880 remain:

- clapboard siding, at least some of which is early—proved by cut nails
- paired windows on the west elevation on either side of the projecting tower, 1st and 2nd story and window trim; second story shutters—proved by style
- windows and window trim along both north and south elevation –proved by construction
- paired decorative brackets at the eaves along the east elevation just beneath the raking gable molding, one of those brackets on the south elevation, western end
- the design concept of a portico dignifying the front entrance and serving as an open “base” to the tower topped with a balustrade.
- large corner quoins
- returns of the raking molding of the gable ends, west and east
- narrow brick chimneys in original locations

The west façade has the most Colonial Revival elements from 1938:

- front portico supported by Doric columns
- portico balustrade entirely different
- windows at second story level of tower only two, not three

-instead of raking molding returns, a full molding outlining a triangular pediment the width of the entire elevation

-tower above second story entirely different: shorter, 1 oculus window, octagonal lantern fully glazed with segmental domed top and flagpole (no cresting, as on Victorian tower

Methodology

Historical information came from Stacey Perron of the Westford Historical Commission and the Westford Library. The Library had an exhibit of photographs and old articles about the Town Hall, no doubt put up because of the extensive work going on at this time.

The paint colors came from examination of ten samples from the building itself, selected based on the older and newer architectural elements, as shown in the two photos submitted with this report, and on accessibility.

A Nikon SMX-10 binocular microscope with the stereo-zoom feature and magnification up to 100x was used. Illumination was by north daylight. Cross sections were cut on areas of greatest paint build-up on four different clapboard samples, four samples from elements of the 1938 front portico, two different shutters (louvers given me by the contractor), and two original sash. It was critical to test for the presence of white lead in the samples, to be sure that the layers were very likely to date from before 1911 (the year titanium dioxide became commercially available to paint companies). A search was also made for pigment particles visible at 16 -20x, but since the Sherwin Williams and Devoe paint companies began manufacturing factory made paints in the late 1860s-1870, it was not too likely that there would be hand ground pigments in the paint on the original town hall.

When the layers and color to be matched were determined, small areas were exposed to UV light for at least 25 hours, to reverse any yellowing of the linseed oil medium, and hence reveal the true hue.

A request was made for one of the original eave brackets, as they were the only place where one might have found something more of an original polychrome paint scheme, but so far, none has been available.

For historical interest, the presence of typical Victorian beige on one clapboard sample suggests that the color scheme for the building's first ten years might have been as described below:

CONJECTURAL COLORS c 1870-1880

Clapboards	soft beige	found on one sample
Trim	deep brown	

Sash very dark brown

Shutter dark green

Note: Public interest in the Town Hall might be created by putting a contest in the local newspaper. The person who named the most original (1870) exterior building elements could win a tour of the early framing in the attic, or something related to the building.

Or, the contest might be to date all extant architectural details to one of three periods:

1870-1880

1881-1938

1939-1970

after 1971

If one of the paired eave brackets of the Victorian period is removed, examining it for original paint colors could be very interesting.